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ABSTRACT

This digest describes parents' role in student learning, school-based parent training programs, building parent programs, using home computers, and school counselors' role in student achievement. (NRB)

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An Information Digest From ERIC/CAPS
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PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Schools by themselves cannot bring about children's academic achievement. In addition to individual student abilities and learning needs, parent involvement in mutual educational goals is crucial to academic success. This digest describes the following: parents' role in helping students learn, sample parent programs offered by the schools, suggestions for building parent programs, the use of home computers, and some possibilities for the role of the school counselor.

Parent Role

When parents show a strong interest in their children's schooling, they help them develop a positive attitude toward learning. Motivated students believe that studying makes the difference between success or failure. Parents can help their children do their best by (1) talking to them, (2) reading to them, (3) listening to them, (4) praising them, (5) watching television with them, (6) keeping them healthy, and (7) showing an interest in their school activities.

Parents can also help their children become better learners by encouraging them to accept responsibility for their own learning and to organize a system for studying. Such a system helps students learn how to pay attention, understand what they read, and develop good study habits.

In general, the two consistent outcomes reported in the parent involvement literature are that parent involvement (1) improves student academic achievement and (2) increases parental support for schools.

Sample Parent Programs

Effective parent programs emphasize the training of those who work with the parents. If paraprofessionals are used, some preliminary workshops may be required on utilizing interpersonal skills, achieving desired learning outcomes, and developing parent-child success experiences.

Parent-Aided Homework (PAH) is a behavior modification program designed to encourage parent involvement in their children's homework (Harris, 1983). Skilled guidance counselors or school psychologists give parents professional assistance in the home to promote study skills and foster positive home/school relationships.

The PAH plan stresses positive reinforcement for successfully completing homework assignments. Parents agree to be responsible for enforcing the agreed-on time limits for homework and to help with assignments when they can. The basic responsibility of parents is to monitor the program. The steps include: (1) explaining the program to the child; (2) finding suitable rewards; (3) providing extra work when needed; and (4) timing and charting behavior.

Another school/parent involvement program promotes parent group discussions and parent/teacher/counselor mini-workshops; provides home learning activities for the parent and child, and encourages parent participation in after-school parent programs (Cotton & Savard, 1982). Children of these parents showed marked improvement in reading and math skills at all grade levels, which in turn increased parental involvement in their children's education.

Project HELP (Home Educational Learning Program) features home learning activities using simple materials available in most homes (Rich, 1983). Orientation and explanation letters are sent home with the children at the beginning of school and specific guidelines are provided on such topics as self-reliance, children as individuals, health, discipline, television viewing, family travel, homework, and working mothers. This individualizes education in a meaningful, personal way at home, and has the additional advantage of being non-threatening to either parents or children because the activities are not traditional school work.

Suggestions for Building Parent Programs

1. Link the involvement of parents directly to their children's achievements. Programs using the model of parents as tutors or home-teachers do build achievement.
2. Provide opportunities for families to supplement and reinforce children's academic skills at home. This method reaches parents, even the least educated, and gets them to work with their child at home, building on their ambitions and love for their child.
3. Initiate local, state, and/or national efforts to expand educational partnerships in ways that support and reinforce one another. Examples

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are home learning activities, family learning centers, and a media campaign to educate the public on the uniqueness of the home as a learning place and its possibilities to help the child achieve.

4. Provide involvement opportunities at all levels of schooling for persons outside the schools. Continuing support is needed as young children become teenagers. Very few programs exist that meet the needs of adolescents. Schools can efficiently operate a communications program for parents of high school students by relying on a dual strategy: (1) regular and timely newsletter communication, and (2) early notification whenever problems arise academically or behaviorally. The Home and School Institute has tested a systematic program for involving senior citizens as volunteers in the classrooms and as liaisons to the home (Rich, 1983). These seniors work with teenagers and families who need extra help.

Use of Home Computers

In recent research, Dede and Gottlieb (1984) found that the impact of the microcomputer on family education patterns was relatively minor. Changes that the study could not substantiate included the following: major shifts in the role of the parent in providing assistance with homework; new types of parent/teacher interaction; the extensive use of the machine for remediation, diagnosis or enrichment; and the substitution of computer-based entertainment for time previously spent on education. The researchers cautioned, however, that the emergence of higher quality software for instruction may alter the situation.

Developments in cable and satellite telecommunications may also affect home computer use. If families can link their computers directly to the schools, new options for learning, teaching and counseling may open up.

Parents thinking about buying a home computer are advised to do some preliminary research, e.g.: (1) discuss the advantages and disadvantages with teachers, counselors and other parents who already own computers; (2) try to acquire some hands-on experience; and (3) identify and assess the uses for their particular home situation.

Counselors as Interpreters to Parents

One area of potential growth and outreach for school counselors is establishing and facilitating parent education groups. Such groups can improve family communication skills, promote children's cognitive functioning, and help both the single- and two-parent family understand the importance of their role as parent-educator. Studies indicate that these groups can mediate the negative effects of single-parent family status on children's academic performance.

Another area is the parent-student-counselor conference, which the counselor can use to set mutual educational goals. For older children, this demonstrates a method of providing career guidance if there are family conflicts about career choices.

In summary, researchers agree that it is parents who provide the most important learning environment, and that if they are not involved in the learning process, schools and students alike are being deprived of an essential source of support.

Resource Documents

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